The Words of ---
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Stories + Incidents
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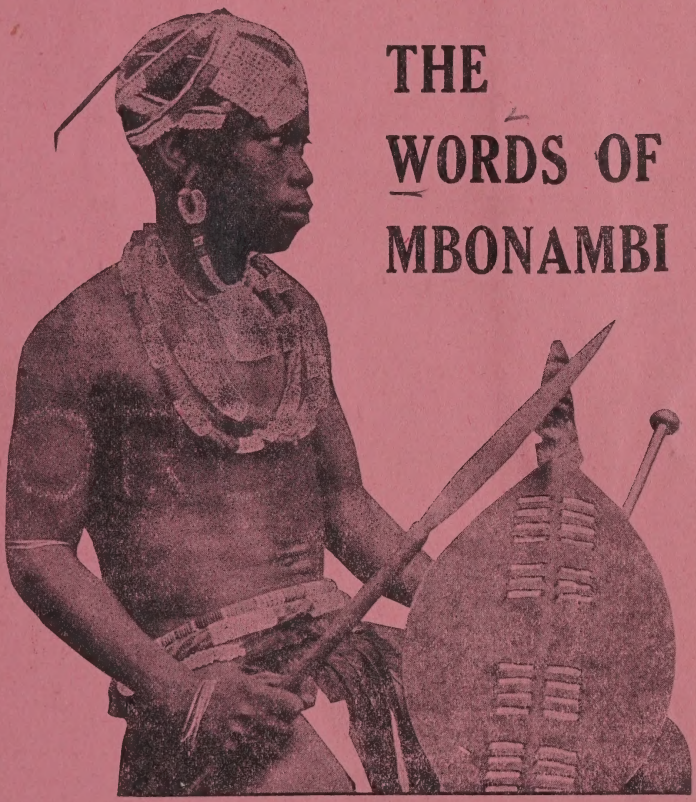
MISSIONARY STORIES No. 10

THE WORDS OF MBONAMBI



A Zulu Soldier.

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1. It is one of the oldest Missionary Societies of the Church of England. It was founded in 1701.

2. It works both amongst *heathen* and our own *colonists*. Two-thirds of its income is spent upon the conversion of the heathen, and the remaining third in trying to prevent white men from relapsing into heathenism. It has a special claim upon all who feel grateful for the aid which the Colonies have recently rendered to their mother-country, and upon all who desire to bind the British Empire together in the bonds of the Christian faith.

3. It *represents no party* or section of the Church of England. Its teaching is that of the Bible and the Prayer Book. John Wesley was one of its early Missionaries in America.

4. It has requests for *further help* from all parts of the world to which it is unable to respond through lack of sufficient means.

5. Every diocesan Bishop in Great Britain and Ireland is officially a member of its Standing Committee. As the representative of the Church at home it has already spent over eight million pounds on the work of the Church abroad.

6. There are at the present time (1917) 1,374 missionaries on the Society's list. *Ordained* (including 10 Bishops), 988—in Asia, 382; in Africa, 292; in Australia and the Pacific, 45; in Canada and Newfoundland, 177; in the West Indies and Central and South America, 85; and 7 Chaplains in Europe. Of the ordained missionaries 306 are non-Europeans—in Asia, 197; in Africa, 102; in Guiana, 2; in Australia, 1; in Canada, 2; and in Trinidad 2 East Indians.

Laymen, 30—in Asia, 23; in Carpentaria, Australia, 3; in Canada, 2; and 2 in Africa. Of these, 11 are non-Europeans—in Asia, 8; in Carpentaria, 2; and in Africa, 1.

Women, 356, of whom 50 are non-Europeans—in Asia, 283; in Africa, 63; in the West Indies, 8; and in Canada 2.

During the year very few licences or permissions to officiate on the Continent of Europe were granted on the Society's nomination by the Bishops of London and Gibraltar.

There are also in the various Missions about 3,000 Lay Teachers, 3,200 Students in the Society's Colleges, and about 67,000 children in the Mission Schools in Asia and Africa.

Every one who reads this book is invited to take charge of a missionary box to raise money for the support of the work of the S.P.G. Boxes can be obtained gratis from the S.P.G. Parish Secretary, or from the Manager of the Publication Department, S.P.G. House, **15, Tufton Street, Westminster, London, S.W.1.**

THE WORDS OF MBONAMBI.

NEARLY 40 years have passed since the news reached England that our English army, which was fighting King Cetshwayo in Zululand, had been defeated and practically destroyed at the battle of Isandhlwana. The story

S. Augustine's Church, Rorke's Drift.

which we print was dictated by one of the Zulu soldiers who was present in this battle and helped to inflict upon us our defeat. He wrote describing an Ordination Service that had

just been held in the great church at Rorke's Drift, and he gives some extremely interesting information relating to the first arrival of Christian missionaries at Isandhlwana soon after the battle had been fought.

He writes, "I am trying to do what I have been asked to do, and that is to write some words about the great work that was done here last Sunday. A great service took place in our big church here of St. Augustine, Rorke's Drift.

"Our father the Umfundisi Mjoniseni (Archdeacon Johnson) says that I am to state first who I am, and why I am asked to write about this great matter. I who cannot speak English am asked to write and tell the English of England about the Ordination to the priesthood of one of the children of our people, and I am to say some words about how we Zulu people regard the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ that has been founded by our white fathers in this our land.

"I am an old man now; I don't know how many years. I am a Zulu of the Mbonambi Regiment, and I am called by my Regiment as is our custom when we show honour to men of any renown. I am a Christian now and my wife is also, and most of my children and grandchildren. It is one of my children who is listening to my words and is writing them down in the English language. I was in the battle of Isandhlwana, in the war between us Zulus and the British. I was wounded in that fight. I was also in the battle of Kambuli, which we call Engabeni-Ka Hawane, where I was wounded again but only slightly, just a bullet through my thigh. I was taken by two of my friends to a kraal near the Duduzi—near to where the Duduzini Christian out-station is now—and my wife and my brother fetched me from there and brought me home to our father's kraal at the Mvunyane; I was young and strong then, I am old now; my wound became very bad because I had to walk, and I was ill a long time and could take no more active part in the rest of the war with the British. Word came that the white people had beaten us and had taken our King Cetshwayo prisoner away to their country. That was the great end of everything; at least we Zulu people thought it was the end of life and freedom, and our hearts were sore for a long time, but we did not hate the white English, they had beaten us, yes, but they were great soldiers—they were men! Some months passed and I had recovered from my wounds

when the chief of our house (tribal chief) called me to a meeting of our tribe at his big kraal near Isandhlwana. It was at this meeting that I heard that a white umfundisi (missionary) had come to live at Isandhlwana. Our chief said, 'It is the beginning of a new order of things, we have another king given us by the Abelungu (white men) in place of Cetshwayo, and now this white missionary has come to live among us.'

Archdeacon Johnson and Catechists.

We returned to our kraals very sad in our hearts. Shortly afterwards our chief called us together again, and he said it was to hear the words of the white umfundisi (missionary), who was coming to speak to the chief's people. It was quite a big gathering and the women had made a lot of beer to do honour to the men of our tribe, and also to do honour to the white missionary. The whole matter was a great surprise to us. I

was greatly startled. We men were sitting down in a half circle and the women were at the back near the big hut of our chief. The missionary came and took up a position in the centre space in front; we all looked at him, and he called out in our own tongue just as one of ourselves. 'Bend down on your knees with your faces to the ground, and let us pray to the Great Spirit.' I can't remember the missionary's words when he prayed, nor the words that he spoke later when we were all sitting down, but there was a new kind of feeling at my heart, a feeling of shock. It was the first time I had ever been called upon to kneel down and take part in prayer to the Great Spirit 'Unkulunkulu." I was shocked, I did not at all like it; I was afraid in my inside. Of course we all knew that everything came from the Great Spirit, the earth, sun, moon, and stars were 'torn off from Him,' but that was in the ancient times. (endulu). The spirit (Idhlozi) that we looked up to now for help in distress was the spirit of our dead fathers, not Unkulunkulu.

"My son (he is really my grandson) who is putting my words on paper says that I am speaking too many words about a simple matter, and that we shall never get to an end if I am going to speak so many words about each meeting for prayer, and it was not about simple 'prayer meetings' I was asked to write, but the big Service of Ordination last week. That is true, but still I think I am right in first explaining how last Sunday's big service became possible. The Ordination Service last Sunday was the ripening fruit. That first service at our chief's kraal years ago was the beginning to plough the land and sow the seed. At that first service there was not one Christian native in the whole of Northern Zululand, and now what did we see last Sunday? The ordination of a fifth native priest, and four native priests taking part in the laying on of hands. All these are children of our own people. They were just little heathen children at that first service held at our chief's kraal, when our father (Archdeacon Johnson) who is old now came first to pray and preach, and the women made such a plentiful supply of beer to do honour to him and to the crowd of our people gathered together that day. How can I describe this wonderful Ordination Service? It is all very wonderful to me. Our beautiful big church built here so near to the battlefield where our nation fought with the British at

Rorke's Drift, and now we all—white and black—come together and kneel down before God in peace in His house. And our Inkosi Mbishop (Lord Bishop) is entitled 'of the Zululo' (Bishop of Zululand). He raises up priests of our people by laying his hands together with the hands of priests of our own people, while a thousand of the children of our people kneel down as one Christian body and thunder forth their great

Archdeacon Johnson's waggon crossing Buffalo River.

Amen in grateful thanks to the Great Father of all who has gathered us together in Christ. What more can I say? We were all heathen wandering in the dark, now many of us are Christians and we can see light. It is not easy to see even yet, oh no, it is often very hard to see and to understand, but *there is light.* And there is hope. I have finished.

"Great is the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

"MBONAMBI OF ZULULAND.

"My boy says I have not said anything of how I was led to become a Christian. Yes, if any Christian of England would care to hear about it I will send some more words. But who am I? just one amongst many thousands!"

A few months after writing this account Mbonambi, in reply to a request that was sent to him from England, went on with his story. He then wrote, or rather said:—

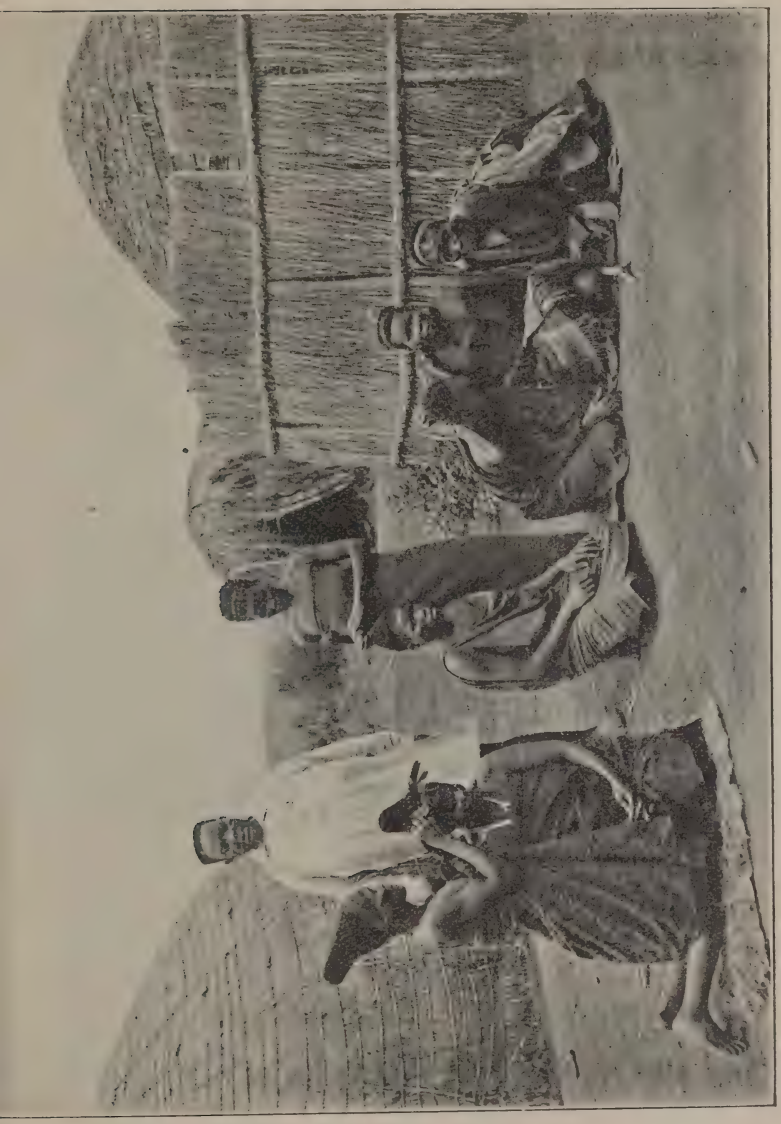
"I am told that I, Mbonambi, promised to relate how I was led to become an 'Ekolwa' (Christian). I do not remember saying any such thing. I do not think I should have been so foolish. How can I describe that which is a mystery? I was not led, I was 'driven.' Does the wind lead the grass and the trees to bend and fall? It drives, it does not 'lead.' You boys don't understand; you have grown up in the light, you have lived in school and grown up in the midst of Christianity. Your Christianity is a habit, just as wearing clothes. No, I am not condemning you in saying this; I simply state facts. You who have been born and have grown up in Christianity may talk of being 'led' by the Great Spirit as oxen are led up and down the food-field ploughing; but we old men and women of the first generation were not led, we were driven. But I cannot describe or relate how I was driven; I can only state facts as they occurred. My words will not be many, for I am weak now in body, and I soon tire; I am ill. You must put down my words just as I say them, not your own words. My father, Mjoniseni (Archdeacon Johnson), will know whether you are writing my words. I am an Mbonambi. Who shall contradict me when I say that the Mbonambi Regiment was one of the greatest fighting regiments of Zululand? It has all gone now; Zululand's greatness is as a dream of the night. You children hardly know even some of the names of the regiments; how can you understand the glory of being a member of such a regiment as the Mbonambi? I was with the Mbonambi at the battle of Isandhlwana, and also at Kambuli (Ngabuni Ka Hawane), which was their last fight as a regiment. The Mbonambi were nearly exterminated. It seemed to me the end of all things. Very few of us returned from that fight unwounded. My bodily wound was slight—a bullet through the thigh; but my heart was killed, that made the wound bad, and I was ill many months. The King (Cetshwayo) was taken prisoner. The regiment of the King fought one last big

battle at the Mahlabatun. The country, the nation, was beaten. My heart was dead, because I realised that we were beaten at our own game in fair fighting, no trickery, no cunning. Treachery we had expected; but simply the bullet and the sword had beaten the assegai and the shield. Had we been beaten by treachery I (and others) would have hoped for another fight, another struggle. It is only when the heart is killed that the Zulu's hope dies. I speak for my own heart; it was dead; I could not feel anger any more. I thought that nothing would make me excited or surprised again.

At a big meeting of our house (tribe) at our chief kraal, when I heard that there was an umfundisi (missionary) from the White House had come all by himself, and was living at Isandhlwana, near the battlefield, and that he, the umfundisi, wanted us to gather together at the big place (tribe chief's kraal), as he was sent, he declared, by the Nkulunkulu (God) with a message for us of Zululand, I was surprised and I felt hurt in my inside. I did not want to hear any message brought by a white man; we are all dead. Why did not the white man leave us to abide in peace now that we are dead? I did not want to go to hear this foolish message; but I did go, and my wives I had then went with me. There was a big gathering, and the women had made lots of beer. The missionary looked like a boy, but he spoke like a man. He talked until the shadows began to lengthen towards the East. He made us kneel down on our place with our faces to the earth, and he knelt too, and he prayed to the Great Spirit so that we could all hear. Some of the women, and also some of the older men who had drunk too much beer, began talking in low voices to each other; but the missionnry soon put a stop to that. He said, 'Is it not the custom among the Zulu people to be very quiet and not even to think aloud when a King's messenger delivers the words of the Great King to his people? Is not that so? Listen then, ye people. I am the Great King's messenger. Here are the King's words written in the Book.' I cannot remember much of what he said, but these words I shall always remember. 'You think you are dead,' he said, 'because you have fought and been conquered. Your hearts are sore now. Your Father, the Great Spirit, sends a message of comfort to you. He knows you. He loves you." The words he said were all new. I was shocked, and I was afraid in my inside. I tried

to forget it all, but I could not for a long time. My wives and children went to the Mbonambi's house at Isandhlwana, and they attended the services, and now the Inkosikazi of the umfundisi had arrived, and she gathered the children into what we now call a school. But I declined to go. I did not want to hear any more.

One night I dreamt that the umfundisi came and knelt by my sleeping-mat and called me, and said, 'Muntu we Nkiri; Muntu we Nkiri.' I woke up, but there was no one there. I slept again, and again came the kneeling man calling me again, 'Muntu we Nkiri'—three times. This troubled me much, and I could not sleep again. I told my neighbour 'Nombona' next morning all about it, and he said, 'It is because your stomach wants some beer, hence you dream dreams.' I listened to him and told my women to make beer. There was not much grain left, as we had lost our crops in the war; but they made beer, and I called my neighbours together, and I drank my fill, and it got into my feet, so that I could not stand or walk, and my heart became light, and I forgot about the kneeling man calling me. The next day my tooth began to ache. After two days and nights without sleep my old wife took me to Matousi, the tooth-extractor. It was very bad, and my wives said they had seen the umfundisi at Isandhlwana take out many teeth, and they wanted to take me to him, but I would have nothing to do with a white man; a black man of my own people was quite sufficient for me. I was afraid of what the white man might do to me, and so it was that after two days and nights without sleep my old wife took me to the tooth-doctor named 'Matousi,' living near the Hlaza Kazi mountain. Three days that man cut with his knife and at my severed jaw with his piece of iron, but the tooth would not move, and the pain nearly drove me mad. Then the tooth-doctor had to confess that the witch (Umtakali), who was working all this evil and pain on me, was too powerful for him, the tooth-doctor My wife took me home, but I could not sleep, and my mouth was too swoollen and sore to allow of my eating anything. I thought it was all done by 'those who hated me,' as the tooth-doctor had said. The pain had got into my inside, and I said, 'One death is overcome by another death. Let me die and it will all end.' I can laugh now at my foolishness, but I do not even now



Dressing hair in a Chief's kraal.

laugh at the pain I endured. Just at the worst one of the children brought the umfundisi to see me. One of my people had told him all about how 'those who hated me' were killing me. He asked for hot water, and poured some medicine into it and washed my mouth. All the pain stopped immediately. He then made me open my mouth, and he just touched my tooth with a tool thing he had in his one hand and out came the tooth. I slept that night and most of the next day, and when woke up I was quite well and free from pain. It was all very wonderful to me. We all felt that in some way the umfundisi had 'worsted' one enemy who had been killing me. When my wives first said this I was afraid in my inside; but they said, 'Is that not just what a medicine man is for? It is the medicine of one man that overcomes the witchery of those who hate us.' I then felt for a time comforted in my heart. The umfundisi would help us in trouble; that was good.

"Soon after this a very terrible thing happened to me. 'Those who hate me' (that was what I thought then, for I was very ignorant) nearly killed me; the umfundisi said at the time that it was just an accident. This is how it happened. An inkosi (officer, Colonel Stab, I think) had been to erect a monument of stone when the Prince of the French people was killed during our war with the white people. I found a small copper tube (detonator) in the grass after he and his party had gone. This, I thought, would do fine as a snuff-box. There was some white stuff inside, and I took my iva (a thin piece of bone sharpened to a point and generally carried stuck into the hair (wool) of the head) and commenced to dig the stuff out of the little tube; but the thing exploded (kwa quma) and blew off three fingers and part of my hand, and it also blinded me. My boy was with me at the time, and he ran and reported to his mother that I was dead, killed by fire. The woman and our neighbour, 'Nombona," came and they took me to the umfundisi. He took the shattered bone out and stitched up the wound. He put some stuff into my eyes and brought back my sight. I bongar'd (returned thanks) to our Ances ral Spirit (Idhlozi lakiti) who had worked through the white man to overcome and undo the evil of 'those who hate me' that were trying to work on me. I stayed the whole of a moon with the missionary. The custom was for all of us to go into the Praying Hut morning and evening, and the umfundisi and his Inkosikazi (wife) taught those who could learn to sing and

pray. I could not pray ; I was torn in my inside with fear and rage against 'those who hate me.' My father (we all call Mjoniseni our father now) talked to me about Nkulunkulu (God), and about the laws of the earth (natural law) and about things that explode. He said that my blown off hand had nothing to do with any secret enemy, and it would have happened to anyone who had picked up the little copper tube if he had poked the white stuff (fulminating powder) about with a

A native church.

sharp bone. It sounded good sense, but he could not answer my question, 'Why was I the man to pick the little tube up?' Ah, yes, I remember it all now ; my heart was very dark and hard, the Great Spirit was still driving me, as I would not be led. My wives and children came often to see me, and they also went into the Praying Hut. My old wife (Insalukazi yami) was barren. She had no child. 'Those who hate us' killed her first child before it was born, and she has never had a live child ; she was now old. Shall I ever forget what happened now to her? She became smitten in her heart after

attending one of the services in the early morning hours, and she asked my consent to her joining the class for instruction. I was angry at her wishing to 'turn' from the spirits of her ancestors; but she persisted, and so I gave way. But my heart was sore, and I did not come near the Mission for a long time. You children that have many Christian friends, you don't know what it means to turn your heart from the spirits of your ancestors; you have lived and been brought up in a Christian kraal. It seems just natural to you to go to church and kneel down and pray; but to see my own wife, that had been given to me when she was a girl, separate herself from me, and from all the other women, who laughed and jeered at her, give herself to what I then thought was a foolish madness, hurt me in my inside. Your mother, my youngest wife, Novuma, laughed and jeered, and asked her if she expected and hoped to get children by becoming a Christian. Ah, yes, we did not know, we did not know; we were like silly, ignorant trees swaying about in a summer breeze; we did not understand how the wind could become angry in a storm and break the ignorant trees. It was that same summer, the women were weeding in the fields, and the sky became black with thunder-clouds; I was at Nombona's kraal. He had a kamba of beer, and we were talking about the umfundisi Mjoniseni, when the storm broke over us, and the lightning struck the hut that the women had taken refuge in from the rain. Your mother (grandmother) Novuma was killed, and the hut was burned down, but the children were rescued by Nozindaba. What more can I say? No, I was not led; I was driven. The umfundisi came and doctored the burned children. He prayed close to the stricken, burned down hut. He prayed for the spirits of the dead women. He prayed for me, and my heart broke inside me; that was the end of the hardness of my heart; that was the beginning of a new life. How could I hold out any longer? I was surprised. It all seemed to come just right. The neighbours wondered at me, but they did not laugh. That is the turning of my heart; and I can now say with joy, 'I believe in God our Father. I believe, and my hope is in my Lord Jesus Christ. I believe in the Holy Spirit of God.' But why do you children make me talk? I am tired; let me sleep; let me rest. If you have written my words wrongly, my father, Mjoniseni, will know. I have finished."

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